HERITAGISATION AND SOCIAL TIME – SAFI: A CITY OF RESILIENCE AND RESILIENT PEOPLE

ANA NENO
ana.s.neno@gmail.com
University of Coimbra

ABSTRACT
The relationship between the city of Safi and the central government has been very fragile at several moments in its history. Even after independence, the delicate relations with the national territory remain a feature of the city. This political context has led the State to distance itself from the development of local cultural policies and the preservation of the built heritage. Investment in industrial growth has also brought profound changes to the social fabric of the city, with a strong impact on its restructuring and on the preservation of historic districts.
Only one of the monuments inscribed on the city's list of heritage buildings is open to the public. Civil society, represented by a very significant number of local associations, has had a very important role in the challenge of reintegrating cultural heritage in the revalorisation strategies designed for the city.
In his work *A Place in History: Social and Monumental Time in a Cretan Town*, Herzfeld introduced the concepts of "monumental time" and "social time" as tools for understanding heritage. His considerations alert us to the difficulty in creating balance between the norms and trends of the heritagisation process, that shape what he terms "monumental time", and the time experienced by the inhabitants of places, whose actions give a sense of present and confer social time to the places they inhabit.

KEYWORDS
heritagisation, Safi, memory, city, post-colonialism

> The past is everywhere a battleground of rival attachments. In discovering, correcting, elaborating, inventing and celebrating their histories, competing groups struggle to validate present goals by appealing to continuity with, or inheritance from, ancestral and other precursors. The politics of the past is no trivial academic game – it is an integral part of every people's earnest search for a heritage essential to autonomy and identity.[1]

In May 2014 I invited historian Hamid Triki from Safi to come and present a preparatory class to first-year students of the National School of Architecture in Marrakech, as they would be leaving soon for Safi to conduct ethnographic fieldwork for the subject "Introduction to the Sociology of Housing and Urban Development". For the students, mostly from Marrakech, Safi was an unknown city and had a very negative connotation.

Hamid Triki's exposition enabled students to better understand how heritage contributes to the construction of the present identity of Safi and how the uses of heritage can be important in rebuilding the image of the city by calling upon its past. Triki began precisely by pointing out how a very important city historically has been neglected to the point of being excluded from the current historical Moroccan landscape: "It isn't even mentioned in the weather report!"

This neglectful approach to the city meant that its historic past took on an ever more important role in the claims of several groups fighting for the city's recognition. The Portuguese legacy has a very prominent presence in the architectural heritage of the city and its cultural wealth and unique characteristics serve to justify its importance. Triki further explained that even though the Portuguese occupation in the 16th century "did nothing but harm" – driven only by the purpose of territorial domination – "it left a rich legacy in the urban structure of the Medina and monuments that must be safeguarded". The negative connotation of a colonial past may be dissipated by the greater value of a heritage resource.

But if we acknowledge that heritage must be valued as a resource that can contribute to the spatial quality of the city, we must then try to understand why the rich heritage of Safi has not always been perceived by the State and central administration in the same way as local populations. Gathercole and Lowenthal explain how culture is sometimes interpreted differently by the two parties:

> At the core of the state, culture is seen as a force to be harnessed for national development. At the periphery, however, culture is often regarded as a way to protect local interests against outside encroachment [...].[2]

[1] Gathercole and Lowenthal 1990, 302.
[2] Ibid., p. 187



Figure 1 – Field trip of the students of the National School of Architecture in Marrakech, supported by the IRMHSS and several local associations. Photo by Ana Neno, May 2014

The neglect of heritage and the feebleness of the public cultural sector in Safi – in relation to neighbouring cities such as Marrakech, Essaouira or El Jadida – are thus sometimes associated with conflicts arising not only from a certain spirit of protest in the city (mentioned in some historical documents), but also from other events in modern and contemporary history, as stated by Triki in his communication: "the conflict with Hassan II against the inauguration of the chemical industry and the exploitation of phosphates, the project for the exploitation of nuclear energy, the emergence of a strong trade union movement in the ports and canning industries, a strong local political consciousness." Safi has been last on the agenda of official visits to Moroccan cities since the succession to the throne of Mohammed VI.

At the time of the French protectorate, in the correspondence between local actors and the colonial administration of the Residency General, there are references to a certain alienation and abandonment of the city. On the occasion of a visit by the Minister Plenipotentiary of the colonial administration to the city in 1948, Mr. Girard, delegate of the 3e Collège, delivered a short speech in representation of the population of Safi to request government intervention for the development of the city: "Safi has too often been forgotten and we would like, Sir, for your visit to mark the very beginning of a period during which the amenities that the community wishes may have an effective start."

In the 1940s, according to another report, the development of the port, driven by the creation of the phosphate company OCP, seriously disrupted the city's balance: "a weakness, a clear break between the countryside and the city."[3]

Later in the 1950s, official reports note that the city of Safi was considered the second largest port and the second most important industrial city in Morocco. With an area of 40km^2, it was compared to the city of Lyon. Reports also indicated a huge growth in population – a doubling in relation to census figures of the early 1930s – and forecast its steady growth. However, while a strong development of the fishing and industrial sectors was announced, social instability posed a serious threat to the central government:

- The population – composed, alongside a minority of former urban settlers, of a patchwork of tribes from the regions of Marrakech and Agadir – is poor, shifting, doomed to permanent and seasonal unemployment.(*)
- Politically, Safi is known for being the second base of the Istiqlal. The "link to the fishing and canning industries" facilitates the dissemination of propaganda and slogans, and explains the fast response capacity.
- Let us recall the following events:
- 1951 – the personnel from the Territory were besieged at "la Kechla" for 48 hours;
- 1952 - the Mahakma[4] was beset; the Pasha had to open fire
- August 1954.

[3] Unknown author, Listing on the Urban Control organisation of SAFI (Moroccan Affairs – Districts), Nantes, Nantes Diplomatic Archives Centre, 30 May 1955, p. 1.

[4] *Mahakma* designates the law courts.

> – 36 terrorist attacks, causing 4 deaths and 10 injured, have been committed since December 1953. [...]
>
> (*) To fight unemployment, the creation of a Placement Office has been requested with the participation of the Municipality and Division of Labour.
> In addition, an employment plan has been established[5].

The relationship between the city of Safi and the central government has been very fragile at several moments in its history. Even after independence, the delicate relations with the national territory remain a feature of the city. This political context has led the State to distance itself from the development of local cultural policies and the preservation of the built heritage. Investment in industrial growth has also brought profound changes to the social fabric of the city, with a strong impact on its restructuring and on the preservation of historic districts.

Population growth is still a current phenomenon and social asymmetries, ever more accentuated, have stimulated new discussions on the future of the city's heritage at the local management level but also among civil society. Civil society, represented by a very significant number of local associations, has had a very important role in the challenge of reintegrating cultural heritage in the revalorisation strategies designed for the city.

Gathercole and Lowenthal mention how important these new heritage actors have become and how their needs and aspirations must be integrated into public policies:

> Majority and minority, elite and folk, rulers and ruled, trained and amateur all differ over how to identify, safeguard and interpret the past. Increasing public involvement demands new perspectives on collecting and custodial care, display and commemoration.[6]

In Safi, a real awareness of the need to include the community in shaping the strategies for the custodial care, display and commemoration of the city's heritage has emerged in recent years. Since 2012, in the context of my doctoral thesis, I have conducted research on issues concerning the processes and policies of heritagisation in the city of Safi. This research has comprised periods of ethnographic work in the archives of the Cultural Heritage Directorate in Rabat and the Diplomatic Archives in Nantes, as well as a long period of field ethnography. In the field, I tried to observe the experiences of local communities and participate in some events with local associations or management authorities, especially with the Regional Inspectorate of Historical Monuments and Sites of Safi (IRMHSS – Inspection Régionale des Monuments Historiques et Sites de Safi).

The guidelines for the various stages of the research were the evolution of discourse throughout the history of heritagisation in Safi and the appropriation of heritage in the construction of a local identity, but also in the evolution of the city's landscape.

[5] Unknown author, Report on the Reorganisation of the Territory of Safi, Nantes Diplomatic Archives Centre, 27 September 1948, p. 1.

[6] Gathercole and Lowenthal 1990, 303.

> Architectural and other manifestations of heritage now enhance community and identity in every state. A rich and representative patrimony is said to promote citizenship, catalyse creativity, attract foreign sympathy, and enhance all aspects of national life (e.g. Bator 1983, Lowenthal 1987).[7]

In his work *A Place in History: Social and Monumental Time in a Cretan Town*, Herzfeld introduced the concepts of "monumental time" and "social time" as tools for understanding heritage. Monumental time is therefore tied to a historicist perspective of the object, selectively of course, and social time analyses the social experience of heritagisation and its consequences in the daily life of the community and of place.

> Between social and monumental time lies a discursive chasm, separating popular from official understandings of history. Social time is the grist of everyday experience. It is above all the kind of time in which events cannot be predicted but in which every effort can be made to influence them. It is the time that gives events their reality, because it encounters each as one of a kind. Monumental time, by contrast, is reductive and generic. It encounters events as realizations of some supreme destiny, and it reduces social experience to collective predictability. Its main focus is on the past – a past constituted by categories and stereotypes. In its extreme forms, it is the time frame of the nation-state. To it belongs the vicarious fatalism – the call to submit to one's ordained destiny – that marks all authoritarian control.[8]

In Morocco, the origin of the formal processes of heritagisation is based on a discourse firmly attached to colonial policies, where native peoples were considered a passive "object" to be identified, with no real role in the construction of a common heritage. Traditions have thus been identified, classified and legitimised by the coloniser, while at the same time being "invented" in some way and decontextualized from its cultural roots and local dynamics. When Morocco gained independence from France in 1956, its cultural legacy, classified by the coloniser, was already embedded in Moroccan daily life and had undergone, without opposition, a process of national appropriation, transforming into a symbol of Moroccan identity or a much desired 'Moroccanness'.

The case of heritage assets of said Portuguese origin falls into this dynamic of heritagisation, but with a very interesting specificity: while originally colonial heritage, it has very quickly integrated the basis of Moroccan identity and has been used in the discourse of communities to validate the idea of antiquity and multiculturalism.

It is within this logic of a unifying monumental time, which serves global interests, that we can understand official discourses on the heritage of Portuguese origin in Morocco and, more specifically, on the case under study: Safi.

In Safi, I had the opportunity to observe, through ethnographic research, how the discourses on the historical monuments of the city

[7] Gathercole and Lowenthal 1990, 308.
[8] Herzfeld 1991, 10.

are fragmented and have resulted in other perspectives on space based on the daily experience of the community. Social time gives these objects a much more interesting complexity and they are viewed in a way which is not always homogeneous and consensual. This kind of conflict between different views on heritage is a central issue in the case of Rethemnos:

> In Rethemnos, this imposed predestination shores up the very fabric of the physical environment. The state has declared the Old Town to be a national historic "monument", although monuments are exactly what residents adamantly insist they do not want to inhabit. They resist the erosion of the uncertainty in their lives and of the transience of their physical surroundings. In their everyday lives, they resent others' attempts to focus too precisely, or to impose order, on their activities.[9]

In the case of the province of Safi, 14 monuments were classified as Moroccan national heritage. All these classifications date back to the period of the French protectorate. The first classification in Safi was granted to the Quartier des Poitiers (Potters' Quarter) in 1920 (*dahir* of 19 November 1920, classified, Official Bulletin no. 423 of 23 November 1920, p. 16) and the last was the residence of the Caid of the Abda tribes, the Dar-Si-Aîssa, in 1954 (Vizierial Order of 2 December 1953, classified, Official Bulletin no. 2150 of 8 January 1954, p. 41).

The heritage objects identified for classification and safeguarding by the French colonial administration did not merely include monuments of local origin, called vernacular, but also, and above all, assets assigned to the period of Portuguese occupation.

With regard to our case study, the monuments and sites of Portuguese origin classified in Safi, from the earliest examples of heritagisation until today, are:

- the Portuguese Sea Castle (*dahir* of 7 November 1922, classified, Official Bulletin of 21 November 1922, p. 1642) ;
- the Land Castle *(kechla)* of Safi (*dahir* of 25 November 1922, classified, Official Bulletin no. 528 of 5 December 1922, p. 1718) ;
- the city ramparts (*dahir* of 3 July 1923, classified, Official Bulletin no. 560 of 17 July 1923, p. 871) ;
- the Portuguese Cathedral in Safi (*dahir* of 21 January 1924, classified, Official Bulletin no. 593 of 26 February 1924, p. 382) ;
- the restricted areas of artistic protection around the Portuguese Sea Castle of Safi (*dahir* of 20 February 1924, Official Bulletin no. 596 of 25 March 1924, p. 544) ;
- and the ruins of the Portuguese church at the cul-de-sac of Sidi Abdelkrim in Safi (*dahir* of 7 May 1930, classified, Official Bulletin no. 921 of 2 June 1930, p. 735).

[9] *Ibid.*

With the exception of the Colline des Potiers (Potters' Hill) and the monuments and sites of Portuguese origin, all other classified objects are located outside the urban limits of Safi. This means that the heritage chosen to represent the city of Safi mostly comprised an impressive array of sites of foreign origin which was classified by the colonisers and which has remained an icon of the city until today.

Nevertheless, if some of these monuments are generally understood by the community as important symbols of the city, such as the Sea Castle or even the *kechla*, others have lost local recognition, as is the case of the remains of the Portuguese cathedral, or have almost disappeared, erased from memory and place, as the remains of the church at the cul-de-sac of Sidi Abdelkrim.

Safi has experienced a significant growth in population over recent decades which, as we have seen, has had very important consequences in urban areas, especially in what is considered the historic centre of the city, where these classified monuments are concentrated.

After a rural exodus from the surrounding regions, a new population has gradually settled in the old medina of Safi. In response to this phenomenon and as a result of independence and a break with colonial policies, the old families from the city abandoned the historic centre in search of comfort and modernity elsewhere, in the new centres of expansion within the city.

The new inhabitants of the medina are therefore mainly made up of those afflicted by poverty and a low educational level, as well as a lack of attachment to this new place, very different from their places of origin.

The voices of these new residents are often hidden behind the discourses of some of the best informed and positioned people in the community, and also forgotten in the construction of official discourses.

> Ethnography can empower voices not usually heard in discussions of tradition, historic conservation, and the like, the voices of those who live in the spaces decreed as monumental by the state. It can recover the unofficial meanings that people often read into official discursive forms (see de Certeau 1984, xiii; Herzfeld 1987a, 144–151). In this way, it places in question official interpretations of past and present.[10]

My first contact with Safi in the context of ethnography was in October 2012. At that time, I understood well the difficulty of accessing the countryside from Marrakech, where I lived. The national road, 160 km long, was a major obstacle and an obvious constraint to the development of the city. Bad road conditions are a constant limitation and increase the distance between these two cities which once had an important relationship.

I knew quite well the structure of the historic centre of Safi, especially from the maps of the Protectorate period and through several visits that I had had the opportunity to make with people related to heritage

[10] *Ibid.*, p. 13.

management. What I considered important was to get in contact with the residents through the observation of their activities in this area and several informal interactions. That's how I met Hamada, one of the many young people who work in the ceramics trade in Safi. Hamada was 25 and lived in Hay Biada, one of the oldest neighbourhoods in Safi, north of the ramparts of the old medina. For this youngster, the city was a place he was proud of and of which he kept photo albums that he claimed to share on its Facebook page.

This first meeting made me discover how these young people are attached to the memory of the glorious and nostalgic past of their city as opposed to the difficulties they experience today. I asked Hamada to draw his mental map of the city. Despite his difficulties, I realised that apart from everyday places – the neighbourhood where he lived, the potters' hill and the ceramics cooperative – the remaining area did not represent any fundamental reference point in his daily life. I asked him to place the Sea Castle in his map. He also introduced a blank space he called the medina and the castle on the other side. I did not interpret this space as a lack of knowledge of the area, which should be very familiar to Hamada. I interpreted it as the non-recognition of points of interest in the current state of the old medina.

This brief first encounter has led me to reflect on the reasons underlying this attachment of Safi's community to the memories of the city, especially to the widely disseminated images of the colonial period, while simultaneously refusing the historic centre and the very elements they value in their collected images of the past.

Herzfeld described his study on Rethmenos as "a study of how people negotiate their sense of place. It is about situating moral identity, about battling the form and future of the physical environment, about shoring up familiar cultural spaces against the encroaching, encompassing strangeness of larger worlds".[11]

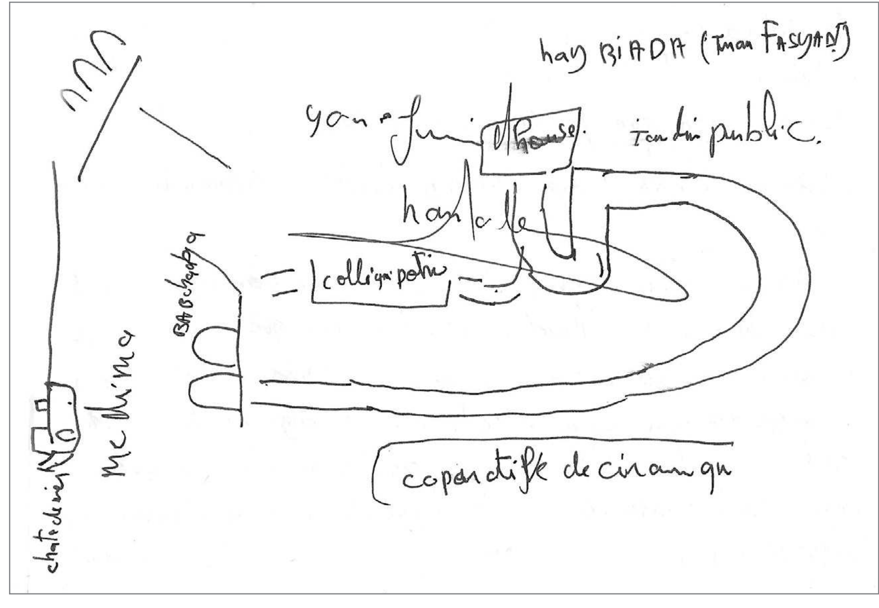


Figure 2 – Mental map of everyday space in the city of Safi by Hamada, October 2012

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 24.

The use of colonial postcard images of the city of Safi[12] was one of the ways found by the community – particularly the poorest classes who live in the historic districts – to validate their sense of belonging, as the new ways of life in these cities no longer fulfil them and the development of heritage regulations has prevented their access to certain monuments on a daily basis as before.

Only one of the monuments inscribed on the city's list of heritage buildings is open to the public. The remains of the former Portuguese Gothic cathedral had been used as public baths until the very beginning of the 20th century and their inclusion on the national heritage list. This *hammam* was one of the best known buildings in the medina, still present in the memories of older people. With the listing process, the cathedral underwent rehabilitation and a reappropriation process was naturally put in place.

Though the conservation of the monument was necessary to pass this masterpiece on to future generations, it is a fact that current generations can no longer make use of this space in their daily lives. The *hammam* at Derb Bouiba has regained the designation of Portuguese cathedral. The cathedral's new status has granted it a new value in official discourse, but it is no longer part of the spatial vocabulary of the inhabitants of the medina, who can no longer visit it.

> By the same token, we should also recognize that most bureaucrats are neither the heartless lackeys nor the choiceless victims of some generic teleology – the state, postmodern hegemony, colonialism. They, too, are situated actors struggling to bend partly recalcitrant boundaries. While their assigned task is to reinforce the monumentalization of official time, through acts of commemoration on the one hand and through their insistence on the eternal validity of law on the other, in practice they must confront an enormous array of decisions to be made and risks to be taken. They must work with conflicting official guidelines on the one side, and under constant social pressure on the other.[13]

Herzfeld's considerations alert us to the difficulty of creating balance between the norms and trends of the *patrimonialisation* process, that shape what he terms "monumental time", and the time experienced by the inhabitants of places, whose actions give a sense of present and confer social time to the places they inhabit. According to Paula Godinho:

> The adjective "up-to-date" has become ambiguous in designating what is ongoing and that which characterises our age. In order for the past not to be abolished, it is necessary that all that is experienced is updated. The time differences between the past, present and future are annihilated thanks to these attempts at updating.[14]

[12] See as an example one of the several Facebook pages that share these old postcards: **www.facebook.com/all1medina**.

[13] *Ibid.*, p. 13–14.

[14] Godinho 2012, 14.





Figure 3 – Cleaning and valorisation initiative in the passage and terrace of the Sea Castle in Safi. Organisation: JEC, Assfou, IRMHSS and Ministry for Youth and Sports. Photo: Ana Neno, June 2013

We are witnessing a very interesting time in Safi, where the practice of dialogue has been developed between associations representing civil society who are on the ground and engage in every possible action to safeguard and revitalise the historical centre, and some local authorities, in particular the Regional Inspectorate of Historic Monuments and Sites who are ever more aware of the importance of such actions:

> [...] it is the combination of heritage, identity and territory as a mirror of the present political challenges that turn these memory processes into objects of struggle and conflict. For several decades now, local authorities, farmers, tourism committees, actors in border areas, transnational communities and certain media have become cultural entrepreneurs who are likely to be the ones proposing cultural heritage contents or challenging official versions.[15]

Very often we see actions developed and coordinated by local authorities and administrations that have derived from the initiatives of these associations, who manage to mobilise a large number of participants, especially young people who live in the historic centre. I could list a number of examples that I know of and still others that are found regularly on social networks.

However, my goal in this article is not to describe and specify these actions, but rather to leave some considerations on these dialogues on heritage which have been developing in Safi and gaining great popularity in recent years.

Actors in the heritage sector have multiplied and are now claiming a place in the future of historic monuments. The openness of local governments to this movement is crucial for the protection of a national heritage that is still unfortunately in a very sensitive state of preservation and, in certain cases, even at risk of disappearing, as in the case of the Sea Castle.

It is important to continue to develop and expand platforms for dialogue with large segments of the population that are still not aware of these matters. In Bourdieu's studies the relationship between individuals and their environment is fundamental to understanding society:

> One of the questions that Pierre Bourdieu tried to answer in his work has been concerned with "what motivates human action"? How do people react in response to external stimuli? Is the extent to how they act influenced or maybe even determined by structural factors?[16]

Cleaning and repairing initiatives in some streets of the old medina in Safi by local associations such as the Youth Association of Building and International Cooperation (JEC – Jeunesse et Coopération des Chantiers Internationaux) in cooperation with the Regional Inspectorate of Historical Monuments and Sites have already had interesting effects in the old medina and they are about to be repeated due to their success among the locals.





Figure 4 – International workshop organised by the UNESCO Chair and the University of Évora, University of California, Berkeley and IRMHSS with the participation of the National School of Architecture in Rabat, University Cadi Ayyad in Marrakech, the Safi Urban Agency and numerous local associations in Safi. Photo: Ana Neno, January 2015

[15] Bondaz 2012, 9–22.

[16] Hillier and Rooksby 2005, 20.





Figure 5 – Repair work in a street of the old medina in Safi, organised by JEC and IRMSS. Photo by JEC, June 2015

Small actions will therefore have echoes for many and motivate numerous actors to take a place in the dynamics of the preservation of the heritage and historic districts of the city of Safi.

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